

NICK CARTER WEEKLY

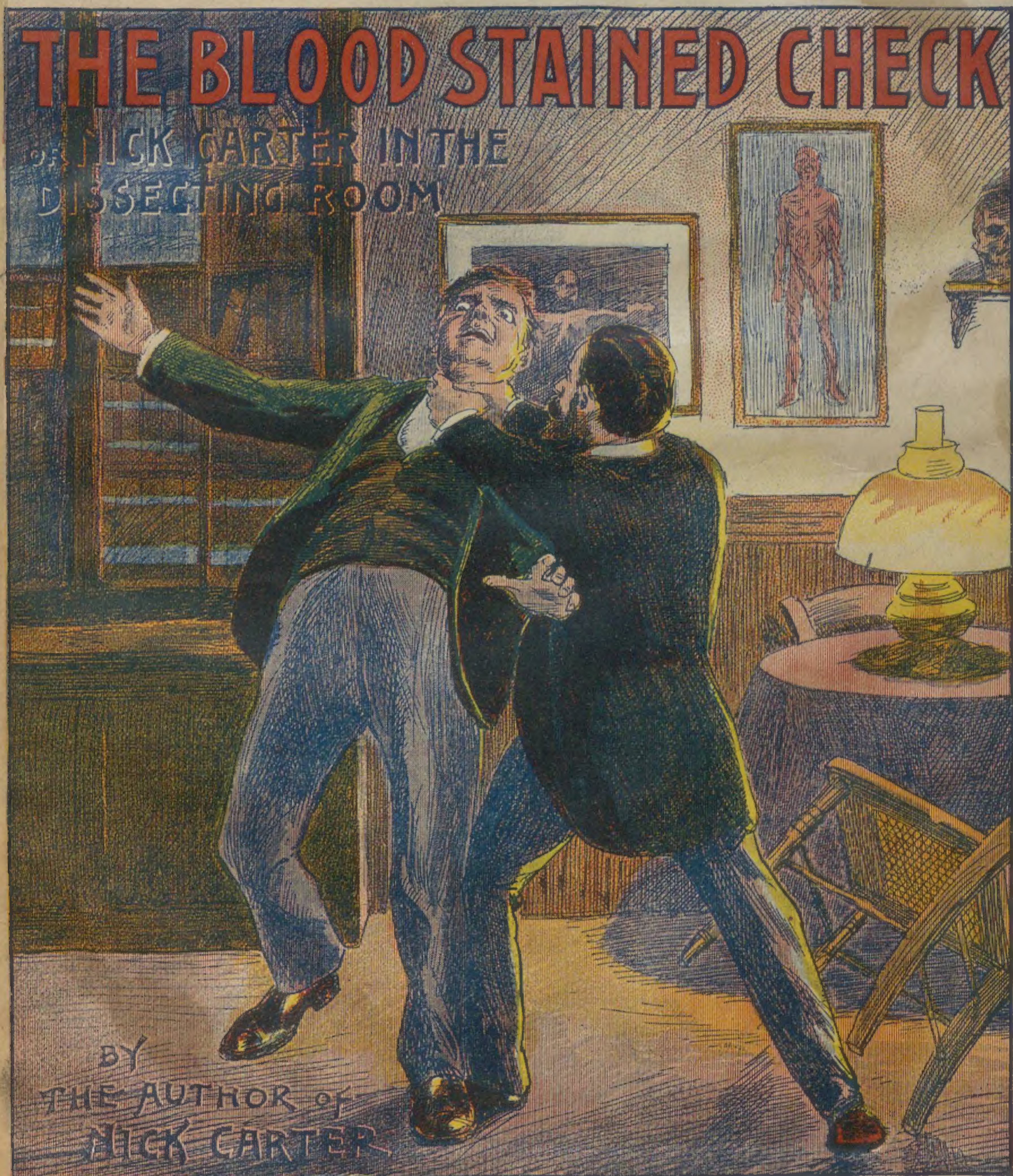
Issued weekly Subscription price \$2.50 per year. Entered as second class matter at the N. Y. Post Office by STREET & SMITH.

No. 182.

Price 5 Cents.

THE BLOOD STAINED CHECK

OR NICK CARTER IN THE
DISSECTING ROOM



BY
THE AUTHOR OF
NICK CARTER

WITH ONE QUICK SPRING CHICK CAUGHT THE BURLY GIANT BY THE THROAT.

NICK CARTER WEEKLY.

*Entered according to Act of Congress in the year 1900 by Street & Smith, in the Office of the Librarian of Congress,
Washington, D. C.*

Entered as second class Matter at the New York, N. Y., Post Office.

Issued weekly.

Subscription price, \$2.50 per year.

June 23, 1900.

No 182. STREET & SMITH, Publishers. NEW YORK. 238 William St., N. Y. 5 Cents.

The Blood-Stained Check; OR, NICK CARTER IN THE DISSECTING-ROOM.

By the Author of "NICK CARTER."

CHAPTER I.

A BIG CHECK AFLOAT.

Nick Carter and his assistant, Chick, were sitting together in the Palmer House, Chicago, one day late in October, when a soft knock sounded on the door of their room.

Chick arose and opened the door to find a policeman in uniform standing in the hallway outside.

"I beg your pardon," said the officer, removing his hat, "but Chief Brennan sent me here with this note."

As he spoke, the officer handed Chick a sealed envelope.

Chick motioned the officer to step inside, passed the envelope over to his chief, and resumed his cigar.

Nick frowned as he mastered the contents of the letter.

"There is a big forgery case down at the office of the Wilmot Trust Company," he said, "and the chief wants us to take it. It

strikes me that we ought to have left Chicago yesterday," he added, with a smile.

"Well," said Chick, "while we are working on a forgery case in Chicago we won't be working on any other case in New York."

"You may tell the chief," said Nick, turning to the officer, "that I will look into the matter and let him know to-night."

The policeman took his departure, and ten minutes later Nick entered the private room of the president of the Wilmot Trust Company.

"It is a bad case," said that gentleman, after Nick had made himself known, "and I hope you will take it."

"Chief Brennan's note refers to an eighty-thousand-dollar check," said Nick. "Has that check been paid?"

"No," replied the president, "but the cashier of the bank might as well have paid it. He certified it."

It may be necessary to state here that when

a cashier of a bank "certifies" a check, he simply guarantees it. In other words, his certification simply says: "This check is all right, and the bank will pay it on demand, if presented by a person known to the bank to be entitled to draw the money on it."

"The forgery must be a remarkably good one," said Nick, "or the cashier would never have done that. Why didn't he pay the check instead of certifying it?"

"Because the check was a very large one, and because the person who presented it was not known at the bank."

"Well, what did the fellow do when he failed to get the money on the check?"

"He did a very foolish thing. He tried to borrow money on it."

"When and where?"

"About two o'clock," began the president, "I received a telegram from a hotel in Englewood, asking if our company had recently issued a check for eighty thousand dollars. I replied in the negative, and requested the clerk of the hotel to cause the arrest of any person exhibiting such a paper."

"That was right. Go on."

"In half an hour I received another dispatch stating that the fellow had disappeared, taking the check with him."

"How did he come to show the check there?"

"It seems that he tried to borrow a thousand dollars on it."

"From whom—the clerk?"

"No, from a boarder at the hotel. The boarder showed the check to the clerk and asked him to find out about it."

"It is strange that he should try to borrow money on the check in advance of getting it cashed," said Nick. "Have you now told me all you know about that part of the transaction?"

"I think so," was the reply. "Everything had to be done by wire, and we were busy,

so I sent for the chief of police. He, it seems, sent for you. When you get to Englewood you will doubtless be able to learn all about the attempt to borrow money on the check."

"I presume so," said the detective.

"Now," continued Mr. Wilmot, "we want you to recover that check and bring the forger to justice."

"It seems to be a hopeless case," replied Nick. "Besides, the check is now known to be a forgery, and can do very little harm."

"I don't know about that," said the president. "You must remember that the bank has guaranteed the check. As the case now stands, we cannot be injured by the latter, but the bank may be."

"Do you mean that if the check should be paid by some outside bank, or money loaned on it, the bank which certified it would have to stand the loss?"

"That is a question of law, but I am of the opinion that the bank is liable."

"Well," said Nick, "every bank in the country will be notified of the matter—that is, every bank that would be likely to cash such a check—and the forger will have hard work getting money on the paper. Still, it may make a great deal of trouble."

"The officers of the bank will not rest, night or day, until they get their hands on it," said the president, "and I can't blame them much for their anxiety."

"It is a serious matter," said Nick. "Perhaps you had better send for the cashier who certified the check."

"I have already done so," said Mr. Wilmot, and at that moment the man referred to entered the room, looking pale and nervous.

"For God's sake, do what you can to get hold of that check," he said, after being presented to the detective. "I am afraid this will be the ruin of me."

"When was the check certified?" asked Nick.

"Shortly after the opening hour this forenoon."

"Can you describe the person who presented it?"

"He was tall and slender and dark, with black hair and eyes."

"That is rather general."

"I remember now that his hair was rather long in the neck. I noticed that as he turned away."

"Had he whiskers or mustache?"

"He had a heavy mustache."

"Do you now recall anything else about the fellow?"

The cashier shook his head.

"I was busy," he said, "and should not have noticed him at all but for the size of the check."

Nick pondered a moment, and then turned to the president of the trust company.

"Have you a private check-book?" he asked.

"Yes," was the reply; "a private check-book with each check numbered in printed figures."

"Was this check drawn on a blank from that book?"

"It was," replied the cashier.

"Were the signatures good imitations of the genuine ones?"

"Yes. They would pass anywhere."

"Was the check numbered?"

"Certainly."

"Did you make a note of the number?"

The cashier took a slip of paper from his pocket.

"Yes," he said, "the number was 51,451."

"That makes the matter easier," said the detective.

Then he turned to the president.

"Let me see your check-book," he said.

"I was just about to examine it as you

came in," said the president, handing out the book.

"Do you sign the checks?" asked Nick.

"No, that is done by the head bookkeeper. He both draws and signs them."

The detective began a careful examination of the stubs.

At first glance the stub of check No. 51,451 appeared to be missing.

Check No. 51,450 seemed to have been followed in the check-book by check No. 51,452.

"That is singular," said Mr. Wilmot, glancing over the detective's shoulder. "I should have thought the maker of the check-book would have noticed that."

"Wait a moment," said Nick. "You will find it all right yet. That check was taken from this book."

"See," he said, in a moment, "there are two stubs together here."

Nick pulled the stubs apart, and found the stub he sought.

It was stuck to the one in front of it.

It was numbered 51,451 and was the stub from which the forged check had been torn, but it was blank.

Nick made a note of the name on check stub No. 51,450 and turned to the president.

"I have it now," he said. "Who is Edward Freeman?"

"Our assistant bookkeeper."

"He drew his salary in the form of a check last Saturday, didn't he? I find his name on stub No. 51,450."

"Then he must have done so," said the president.

"Now," said Nick, "let me tell you what happened. Checks No. 51,450 and No. 51,451 were stuck together in the book."

"I begin to understand," said the president, excitedly.

"Edward Freeman received check No. 51,450, and when it was torn out of the book,

check No. 51,451 clung to it, the two stubs also remaining together, so closely together, in fact, that the bookkeeper did not notice the blank stub when he began his work this morning."

"It seems so."

"Then," continued Nick, "Edward Freeman received besides the check for his salary, a blank check last Saturday—blank check No. 51,451."

The president of the trust company sprang to his feet.

"I shall order the arrest of Mr. Freeman at once," he said.

"It looks black for him," said the detective, "but perhaps you had better hear his story before placing him in the hands of the law."

Mr. Wilmot left the room and returned in a short time with the assistant bookkeeper.

"Does Mr. Freeman know why he has been called in here?" asked the detective.

Mr. Wilmot shook his head.

Then the detective turned toward the suspected man.

Edward Freeman was young, and muscular and handsome, with light brown hair and mustache and frank blue eyes.

"He doesn't look like a forger," thought the detective.

"Now, Mr. Freeman," began Nick, "you received your salary in the form of a check, last Saturday night?"

"Yes, sir."

"What did you do with that check?"

"Having no use for the money," was the reply, "I kept it. I have it in my pocket at this moment."

"Will you let me see it?"

"Certainly."

The young man took out a long leather pocket-book as he spoke and opened it.

After running through several compartments, he looked up with a shade of anxiety on his handsome face.

"I am sure I put it in here," he said; "and yet I cannot find it."

He turned the contents of the pocket-book out on the table, and the detective aided him in the search.

The check was nowhere to be found.

"Tell me," said Freeman, "why I am asked these questions?"

"All in good time," said Nick. "Did you examine the check after receiving it?"

"Certainly not. I just put it in in this book and went home."

"Did you show it to any one?"

Freeman hesitated.

"Yes," he said, in a moment; "I did."

"Who was it?"

Again the young man hesitated.

"If my showing it to a person is likely to get that person into trouble," he said, "I decline to state."

"When did you show it?"

"Saturday night."

"When you exhibited the check," said Nick, "did you observe anything peculiar about it in regard to thickness or thinness?"

"I remember of hearing the remark that it was drawn on very thick paper," was the reply.

"Who made that remark?"

"Miss——"

The young man saw that a trap had been set for him in the seemingly innocent question, and stopped.

"You decline to state?"

"Yes, sir."

"What is the character of the lady to whom you showed the check?" was Nick's next question.

The assistant bookkeeper started, and an angry flush swept over his face.

"Don't get excited," said Nick, with a smile. "Is she entirely respectable and above suspicion?"

"Yes, sir."

The detective handed the suspected man the check-book.

"Do you see anything peculiar about that?" he asked.

Freeman examined the book and handed it back.

"Yes, sir," he said. "There is a blank stub in it. The stub next to the one representing my check is blank."

"Do you realize what that means?"

"Carelessness on the part of the book-keeper," was the reply.

"Anything else?"

"No, sir."

"Well," said Nick, "when your check was torn out, the next blank to it was also torn out. In other words, you received a check for your salary and a check blank."

"Well, has that check blank made its appearance?" asked Freeman.

"It has."

"Then that ends the matter, I suppose," said Freeman.

"Not quite," said the detective. "That blank check was filled in for the sum of eighty thousand dollars and presented at the bank for payment this morning."

Freeman turned pale.

"My God!" he exclaimed. "You surely don't suspect me?"

"You are suspected," said Nick, coolly. "Now perhaps you will tell me who, besides yourself, handled that check last Saturday night."

"I cannot."

"You know what the result of your refusal will be?"

"Yes."

"And still you refuse?"

"Yes, sir."

"You are throwing away the only chance you have of proving your innocence," urged Nick. "Think a moment. The blank check may have become detached from your check

while in the hands of that other person. In that case she may have committed the forgery."

"Impossible," groaned the young man.

"Or," continued Nick, "it may have been lost while you were exhibiting your check. In that case any other person may have found it and attempted to use it fraudulently."

A gleam of hope shot into the young man's eyes.

"Tell me where you were when you showed the check," said Nick.

The look of hope died out.

"I can't do it," said Freeman. "It would simply amount to telling you the name of the person to whom the check was shown. That person has trouble enough without my adding to it."

"You may call an officer, Mr. Wilmot," said Nick.

"This will kill my mother," gasped the young man.

"Don't blame me if you are taken to prison," said Nick, sternly. "Blame yourself."

An officer soon arrived, and Freeman was taken from the room.

The detective signaled the officer, as he went out, to remain in the building with his prisoner until further orders.

"Well," said the cashier, "what do you make of it?"

"It looks rather black for Freeman," said Nick, "still he may be innocent for all that."

"I don't see how you can reach any such conclusion," said the cashier, impatiently. "He takes the loss of his own check too easily."

"In the face of such a calamity as his arrest," said Nick, "he overlooks that. Besides, payment on it may be stopped at the bank."

"It is very strange," said Mr. Wilmot,

"that he should refuse to give the name of the person to whom he exhibited the check."

"That person is his sweetheart," said Nick. "Naturally he desires to keep her name out of the case, whether he is innocent or not."

"You state that he may be innocent," said the cashier, "and still you place him under arrest."

"I have formed no theory regarding his guilt or innocence," replied Nick. "Wait until I have had a day of the case, and I can tell you more about it."

"Well," said the cashier, "you will never make me believe him to be an innocent man. Why doesn't he give the name of that person?"

CHAPTER II.

THE FORGER'S VISITORS.

Before leaving the building Nick went to the room where the officer sat with his prisoner.

"Where do you live?" he asked, abruptly, of Freeman.

The young man gave a number on Second avenue.

"You are unmarried?"

"Yes, I live there with my mother."

Nick turned to the officer.

"Tell Chief Brennan," he said, "to place him in a room alone and to give him every opportunity of communicating with his friends."

Then the detective went to his room where he had left Chick.

"What is it?" asked the assistant, lighting another cigar.

"It is a big forgery case," was the reply. "There is a mystery connected with it, too."

In a few words Nick explained the case.

"Freeman acts mighty queerly," said Chick. "What do you make of it?"

"He may have lost the check and the blank one with it," said Nick, "and again he may

have aided in the forgery. The first thing is to find out what sort of a man presented it at the hotel in Englewood.

"I suppose so. And then?"

"We must find out where Freeman spent last Saturday evening."

"How?"

"By his mother. He will undoubtedly send a note to her. That note will ask her to see the person who saw the check last Saturday night."

"Undoubtedly."

"The note will not give the name or address of that person, for Freeman is too sharp for that. We can, however, find out what we want to know by watching the mother and her correspondence."

"But she may not know the person. In that case the name and address will have to be in the note."

"If she does not know the person, she will not be asked to see her. Then we must find out in some other way. While I go to Englewood, you go to police headquarters and be ready to deliver any note he may wish to send out."

"Good idea."

"If you go to his mother, watch her closely, and find out by the people in the vicinity what sort of a man Freeman is. If you go anywhere else be doubly careful. The mother lives at this address."

Nick handed his assistant a card as he spoke.

Chick hastened away, and Nick took a train for Englewood.

He discovered the hotel to be a very respectable one, and found the clerk intelligent and perfectly willing to answer questions.

"Can you give me a description of the man who asked for a loan on the check?" asked Nick, after stating his business.

"He was tall and slender and very dark."

"What name did he register under?"

"John Roberts, Philadelphia."

"When did he come here?"

"Last night."

"Did he bring any baggage?"

"Only a light valise."

"Did he appear to have business in the neighborhood?"

"No; he just sat around the hotel."

"Is the man he tried to borrow money of in the hotel now?"

The clerk smiled.

"He is out looking for the young fellow," he said. "There will be a first-class scrap if he finds him."

"Why?"

"Well, the man who had the check seems to be very much stuck on cards. About one o'clock he got to drinking heavily and started a game in a private room. We don't allow gambling here, if we know it, but we can't always catch on to the games."

"I see," said Nick, with a smile.

"Well, this man Roberts, or whatever his name is, being a little full, lost heavily. When he got broke he flashed this check and put it up for a big bet, never thinking about losing, of course."

"And he lost?"

"Yes. Then the man who had won the pot brought the check to me and asked me to find out about it, first trying to get me to take it and advance the money he had in it."

"Suspicious, eh?"

"It seems so. Well, this man Roberts stood there while he was talking to me, looking scared half to death, and insisting on having the check returned to him. He was pretty sober at that time."

"I don't doubt that," said Nick.

"Well, I had the check in my hand," continued the clerk, "and was trying to call up the Wilmot Trust Company, in order to find out something about the matter, when the man who had given me the check went into

the bar-room a moment. As soon as he disappeared, Roberts, as he called himself, sprang at me like a tiger, snatched the check from my hand, and dashed out of the place."

"The man who won the pot will hardly find him," said the detective. "He may be out of town before this. Did he look like a city man?"

"Decidedly so."

"Can you show me the room he occupied?"

"Certainly."

Accompanied by the detective, the clerk took the elevator to the second floor and entered a front room.

"Why," he said, looking around the place, "it is just as he left it this morning. The girls must be slow about their work to-day."

"Ah," said Nick, stepping up to the dresser, "the fellow had curly hair, didn't he?"

"Yes; but how did you find that out?"

"He was disguised," was the reply. "See, he stood here arranging his wig. It came down a little too far on the temples and he clipped it off. Here are the pieces."

"Disguised," repeated the clerk, "I never should have suspected it. He looked all right."

"That shows that we have a cunning criminal to deal with, if he did a foolish thing in staking the check," said Nick. "Now, how dark was he?"

"Very dark. I took him for a Spaniard."

"As dark as that?"

Nick held up a piece of cloth as he asked the question.

"Just about," was the reply.

"He used this to put the color on with," said Nick. "See, there is another piece of his complexion on the edge of that towel."

The clerk looked at the detective in open-mouthed astonishment.

"I guess you have handled cases like this before," he said.

"One or two," replied Nick, with a smile. "The fellow smoked a good many cigars here," he continued. "Did he get them in the house?"

"Yes. He sent down for some quite late last night."

"By whom did he send?"

"The hall-boy."

"Will you call the boy here, please?"

The hall-boy was soon in the room.

"Who ordered the cigars?" asked Nick.

"No. 27's friend," was the reply.

"That is the number of the room," said the clerk. "The boys go by that in referring to guests of the house."

"Had a friend here, did he?" asked Nick.

"Yes, sir."

"Describe him."

"He was a nice-lookin' feller, with light hair and a white face."

"Light mustache and blue eyes?"

"Yes, sir."

Nick barely suppressed an exclamation of astonishment.

The description was that of Edward Freeman.

"Did you hear the dark man say anything?" was the next question.

"You mean No. 27?" asked the boy.

"Of course—the dark man."

"Huh!" said the boy. "He wasn't dark."

"Look out now," said the clerk, "and tell the truth. This man is an officer."

"Well," persisted the boy, "No. 27 wasn't dark. He was as white as the other man, only he had black eyes and straight black hair."

"Straight black hair?"

"Yes, sir."

After some further talk the boy was sent away, but the detective called him back to ask if any one else called on No. 27 that night.

He replied in the negative, and went whistling down the hall.

"This knocks me out," said the clerk. "What do you think now?"

"It is easy enough," replied Nick. "The fellow knew some one would visit him and removed his disguise, putting it on again this morning."

"That must be it," said the wondering clerk.

Just then the boy was heard pounding on the door of the room.

"Say," he said, when admitted, "No. 27 had a man here this morning, he did."

"Who saw him?" asked Nick.

"The chambermaid."

"Send the chambermaid here," said the clerk.

In a few moments a very pretty girl entered the room.

"Yes," she said, on being questioned, "No. 27 had a caller this morning."

"Describe him," said Nick.

"He was tall and stoop-shoulder, with a haggard face and the brightest eyes I ever saw in a man's head."

Nick handed the girl a dollar.

"You are the first woman I ever knew to give a concise description of a man," he said. "What else did you notice about him?"

"I noticed that he smelt strongly of drugs as he passed me in the hall."

"What kind of drugs?"

"I don't know, sir."

"It wasn't whisky, was it?" asked the clerk.

"Oh, no, sir."

"What time was the man here?" asked Nick.

"He came about nine o'clock, and remained a long time."

"Is that the reason why you skipped the room in doing up your work this morning?" asked the clerk.

"Yes, sir."

"Then he probably remained until nearly noon?"

"I should think so."

Nick bent over the wash-basin and sniffed vigorously.

"The girl is right about the drug smell," he said. "The fellow had iodoform about his person, and got some into the water when he washed his hands."

"But why should he wash his hands here?" asked the clerk. "There was nothing in the room to soil them."

"Because he aided the young man in putting on his complexion," replied the detective.

"How do you know that?"

"He washed not only his hands, but his face," replied Nick, "and some of his gray hair came out. He was gray, was he not, my girl?" added the detective, turning to the chambermaid.

"Yes, sir; quite gray about the temples."

"That will do," said Nick. "You may go, unless you have something else to say."

"I've told all I know about the matter," replied the girl, "except that the old man went away first. He sneaked away, as if he didn't want to be seen."

"Well," said the clerk, "this beats me. What do you think of the fellow now?"

"I am not ready to express an opinion," was the reply.

Nick left the hotel, after thanking the clerk, and went to the nearest telegraph office, he wrote and dispatched a message to the chief of police.

He briefly accepted the case and asked for information regarding his assistant.

In a few moments a reply was handed him.

Chick had just been handed a note addressed to the prisoner's mother.

Nick answered that he would meet Chick

before he got to the residence of Mrs. Freeman, and hastened away.

He met his assistant only a short distance from the house.

"Now," he said, reaching out his hand for the note, "while I deliver this you find out what you can about the Freemans."

Mrs. Freeman, who lived in the first flat, answered the detective's ring in person.

She was a handsome, gray-haired old lady, with the air and manners of a person familiar with good society.

A look of anxiety overspread her kind old face when Nick presented the note and announced that it was from her son.

After reading the short message, she dropped into a chair and covered her face with her wrinkled hands.

"It is all some horrible mistake," she said. "My boy is innocent of any wrong-doing."

"As an officer of the law," said Nick, "I had a perfect right to open that note and read it, but I did not. Will you allow me to read it now?"

Mrs. Freeman passed over the note without a word.

It read:

"MY DEAR MOTHER:—I am under arrest, but I am innocent. There must be no concealment from Edith. Break the news to her gently, and hope for the best.

EDWARD."

"Tell me about it," said the woman, who seemed to have aged five years since reading the note.

"First," said Nick, "allow me to ask you a few questions."

"Go on."

"Did you see your son last Saturday night?"

"Certainly. He came home to dinner as usual."

"Did he mention having received his salary?"

"Yes. He received a check instead of currency."

"Did you see the check?"

"I did not."

"Where did he go that evening?"

"To see the girl mentioned in that note, Miss Edith Harlan."

"What is she to him?"

"He hopes to make her his wife."

"What time did he return home?"

"About ten o'clock."

"Did he speak of having called at any other place during the evening?"

"He did not."

"Did he mention having shown her the check?"

"No."

"Did he say anything more about the check, either that night or afterward?"

"He did not."

"Where was he on Sunday?"

"At home."

"Was he also at home on Sunday night?"

"No, sir. He went to see a friend in Englewood."

"Did he tell you the name of the friend?"

"He did not."

"What time did he get home?"

"About eleven o'clock."

"Did you see him that night, after his return?"

"Yes. I waited for him."

"How did he appear? Did you notice anything unusual in his appearance?"

"I thought he acted strangely—rather depressed."

"Now, where does Edith Harlan live?"

"With her father in Maplewood."

"What business is her father in?"

"I should have said," she replied, "that the man is only her father legally. He adopted her when she was an infant. He is a surgeon."

"Ah."

Nick thought of the iodoform in the wash bowl at the hotel in Englewood.

The woman did not notice the exclamation, and Nick went on.

"What sort of a man is Dr. Harlan? Describe him."

"He is tall, slightly gray about the temples, and very stoop-shouldered. His eyes are dark and very large and bright."

"Well," thought the detective, "the case seems to be an easy one, after all. This is the man who called at room 27 this morning."

"What is his reputation?" was the next question.

"I believe he is not well thought of. I don't approve of my son's attentions to his adopted daughter, but I have never so expressed myself to Edward."

"Does Dr. Harlan have a good practice?"

"He has practically none at all. He lives in a cottage surrounded by large grounds, and devotes most of his time to his flowers—mostly poisonous—and his skeletons. He is a crank on the subject of dissection and anatomy."

"How does he live?"

"No one knows. There are hints of questionable methods of procuring money."

"You are very frank, Mrs. Freeman."

"I am speaking the truth."

"Has your son a rival in the affections of Miss Harlan?"

"I believe so—one Jasper Malloy."

"What do you know about him?"

"Nothing, except that he is favored by the doctor, and that he is said to be very wealthy."

"Have you ever seen him?"

"Once or twice."

"Describe him, please."

"He is tall and slender, with black hair and eyes, and a very white complexion."

"The case is won," thought Nick. "I may

as well make a couple of arrests and go home. This is the man who presented the check for payment."

"Now," said Mrs. Freeman, "will you tell me about the charge against my son, and explain why you have asked these questions?"

"Certainly," said Nick, and he told her the whole story of the scene in the office, saying nothing of the Englewood incident.

"You will find my son's check in the Maplewood cottage," said Mrs. Freeman, after listening to the recital, "and you will also find the forger there. I am sure my son had nothing to do with it."

Nick very wisely said nothing regarding Edward's visit to the man at the Englewood hotel.

It looked blacker than ever for the young man, and the detective was heartily sorry for the gray-haired mother, who reposed such confidence in her boy.

It looked very like a scheme between the three men, though why Edward should be mixed up in such an affair with his rival was more than Nick could understand.

"I'd like to know," thought Nick, as he left the house, "who presented the check at the bank this morning if Edward was at his desk and the doctor and Jasper Malloy were both in room 27 at the Englewood hotel? I must think that out."

The woman had given him the street and number of the Maplewood Cottage, and he decided to go there at once.

He met Chick soon after leaving the house, listened to a good report of the Freemans, and the two detectives crossed to the West Side.

CHAPTER III.

A FAIR POISONER.

The Harlan cottage stood some distance north of Fullerton avenue, in Maplewood, a pretty suburb of Chicago.

It was surrounded by an acre or more of inclosed grounds, which were thickly studded with trees and shrubs.

The cottage itself was an old-fashioned structure, with wings and additions reaching out in every direction.

In the rear was a large conservatory connecting with the cottage.

It was at least three hundred feet from any house, the grounds across the street being unoccupied.

"Now," said Nick, when they reached the place, "you hang around on the outside, while I see what I can learn by going in."

"Are you going to arrest the doctor?" asked Chick. "He's one of the men we want, sure."

"That depends on circumstances," was the reply.

It was now about seven o'clock, and consequently dark, so Chick had no difficulty in concealing himself near the cottage.

Nick walked up the path leading to the front door, and rang the bell.

In a moment the door was opened by a handsome, stylishly dressed young lady, who seemed to be annoyed at finding a stranger on the porch.

"I am looking for Miss Edith Harlan," said the detective, wondering if the woman before him was the one who had captured the affections of the assistant bookkeeper.

"What do you want of her?" asked the woman, or girl, rather, for she was not more than eighteen.

"I come from Mr. Edward Freeman," replied the detective, "and I wish to see Miss Harlan alone."

A sudden expression of interest came into the girl's face.

"Come in," she said, with a smile which seemed to the detective to be forced, "I am Edith Harlan."

Nick followed the handsome girl into a

plainly furnished parlor, and was handed a chair.

"First," said the detective, "is your father in the house? If so, I prefer to talk in his presence."

"A moment ago," said the girl, "you stated that you wished to see me alone."

"Well," replied Nick, "at that time I did not know that I was addressing Miss Harlan."

"My father is not here," said the girl. "I am alone in the house with the servants."

The girl was beautiful, beyond all question, still Nick did not like her looks.

"She is sharp as a steel-trap," he thought, "but her face is far from being an innocent one. Well, Edward Freeman is not the first young man who has been led into crime by a handsome, treacherous woman."

"In that case," said Nick, in reply to the girl, "I must do my business with you alone."

"Proceed, please."

Thus far Nick had not encountered a single obstacle in the case. In fact, the case now seemed to be an unimportant one, and he was in a hurry to close it. Therefore, he made a bold beginning in addressing himself to the girl.

He pursued the same course that Edward Freeman himself would have pursued, had he been present in person, and firm in the resolve taken at the trust company's office—the resolve to keep the girl he loved out of the case, at whatever cost to himself.

"Mr. Freeman," he began, "exhibited a check here last Saturday night. That check has now disappeared."

The statement was half a question, for Nick wanted to see what the girl would say, but she remained silent.

"He now desires," continued Nick, "that you forget the circumstance entirely, and that you talk with no one on the subject."

Still no answer.

"Complications may arise because of his action on Saturday night," Nick went on, "but, whatever takes place, he desires you to be kept entirely above suspicion."

"Above suspicion," repeated the girl. "That is a strange expression to use to me."

"You recall the circumstance to which I allude?" asked Nick.

The girl did not reply.

The detective was not progressing very rapidly.

"The check will be asked for," continued Nick; "but he relies upon you to remain silent."

Then the woman opened her lips, not to make reply, but to ask a question.

"Are you a detective?" she demanded.

For a moment Nick was at a loss for an answer.

He was afraid he had already said too much.

"That is neither here nor there," he finally said. "Mr. Freeman wants to protect you at all hazards."

Without replying, the girl arose, and walked toward the door.

"Excuse me a moment," she said. "I have overlooked a slight matter of detail in the kitchen, and must attend to it at once."

"That girl," thought Nick, "is about as sharp a female as I ever ran across. I haven't made a single point yet."

Finding himself alone in the room, he arose and looked keenly about.

At one end of the apartment was a large writing-desk, and he at once approached it.

The writing-table was down, and Nick hastily gathered up the sheets of paper with which it was littered.

Many of them bore very imperfect copies of the signature of the president of the Wilmot Trust Company.

"Whatever the girl may say now," thought Nick, "this settles the forgery matter."

He had barely time to place the papers in his pocket, and move away from the desk, when the girl re-entered the room.

"You asked for father a moment ago," she said. "He has just come in, and will see you in his study."

Nick arose and followed the girl from the room.

After passing through two connecting rooms, he was shown into an apartment at the rear of the house.

Through a glass door to the south he could see into the conservatory he had observed before entering the cottage.

The room was long and narrow, the walls being lined with shelves and cupboards.

The windows were protected by heavy iron shutters, which were now closed.

"Father stores his treasures here," said the girl, with a faint smile, "so you need not wonder at finding it more like a prison than a room in a respectable house."

With the girl leading the way, Nick passed through the room, and entered a small, bare, closet-like apartment opening from it.

The furniture of the place consisted of a small table and two old wooden-bottom chairs.

"Why," said the girl, drawing back, "father is not here. He must have stepped out for a moment. Be seated, please. He will doubtless return at once."

The detective seated himself in one of the chairs, and the girl went away, leaving the door opening into the next room ajar, but closing the one leading from that apartment into the main part of the cottage.

Nick arose and stepped out into the larger room.

The shelves were piled high with the bones of animals, and here and there a skeleton leaned against the walls.

He opened cupboard after cupboard. They all contained human skeletons.

Then the detective recalled the words of the assistant bookkeeper's mother.

"He is a crank on the subject of dissection and anatomy."

The sight of the skeletons was too ghastly for Nick to regard with any degree of composure, and he soon returned to the little den where he was to await the arrival of the doctor.

The closet—for it was little better—had no windows, and the ceiling was very low, almost within reach of his hand.

He rapped softly on the walls with his knuckles, and they gave forth a hollow, metallic sound.

"It is a queer place," thought Nick. "I wonder what the doctor uses it for?"

Just then the door connecting with the outer apartment closed without any visible agency.

Then the detective began to realize that he had walked into a trap.

"How coolly Miss Edith Harlan carried out her part of the scheme," he thought. "What an actress that girl would make. Freeman would better go to prison for a few years than be tied to her for his whole life. Now, I wonder how I am to get out of here?"

It was a great relief to know that Chick was not very far away.

Nick examined the door, and found that it was fastened, there being no key-hole on the inner side. The casings were padded with rubber, thus making the closet practically airtight.

While Nick puzzled over the matter, he recalled the interesting details of a newspaper clipping he had recently read.

The article described a place similar to the one in which he now found himself. In fact, the doctor's closet might have been constructed on the plans laid down in the article, so complete an imitation was it of the one written of.

The closet, the article stated, was used by a very humane anatomist, for the purpose of destroying animals of the larger sort doomed for dissection.

The animals were placed in a closet, according to the clipping, and all outer air shut out. Then a destroying gas was forced into the place by means of protected openings in the walls.

It was stated that the creatures died without pain, and, what was more to the purpose—from a scientific standpoint—without mutilation or loss of blood.

The character of the poisonous gas had not been described.

"Nitrogen," thought Nick, "might be made by placing heated copper filings inside of tubes conveying common air into the room, the copper filings absorbing the oxygen in the air."

"In that case, however, the nitrogen would carry the odor of carbolic acid gas, which can only be removed by forcing the nitrogen through a solution of potash.

"This the poisoners would not take the pains to do, so, if I am to die by nitrogen, I shall be warned by the carbolic acid smell.

"The scheme may be all right for small animals, but I do not believe enough poison can be forced into this room in any such way to take the life of a healthy man."

The detective watched patiently for some indications of carbolic acid gas.

Presently he felt a sense of suffocation, and then he detected the odor he feared.

Then the flame of the lamp on the table grew dim, and died out.

Nick cried out with all his strength, hoping to attract the attention of his assistant, who could not be very far away.

His unimportant case had developed into a desperate one.

Gasping for breath, he reeled about, finally falling by the door.

Then he heard the sound of breaking glass in the direction of the conservatory, felt a gush of fresh air, and all was blank.

CHAPTER IV.

THE DOCTOR'S SHOES.

When Nick Carter regained consciousness he was in bed at the Palmer House.

At first he could not remember what had happened, and then smiled as he saw a physician over him with a look of anxiety on his face.

"What is it?" he asked.

At the sound of his voice Chick arose from a chair and approached the bed.

"You had a mighty close call," said the assistant.

"Yes," said the physician, "for hours we could not tell whether you would live or die."

"That gas is enough to kill any one," said Chick. "I got a pretty good sniff of it myself."

Then the scene at the Harlan cottage came back to the mind of the detective.

"How did you get in there!" asked Nick, grasping Chick by the hand.

"I broke through the conservatory," was the reply.

"But the door?"

"It was bolted on the outside," replied Chick. "There was no lock. I guess the doctor never had anything larger than a dog in there before night before last."

"Night before last?" repeated Nick, in amazement. "How long have I been lying here?"

Chick looked at his watch, and saw that it was nine o'clock.

"Just about forty-eight hours," he said.

The physician put on his hat, and turned toward the door.

"It is useless for me to warn my patient against exerting himself," he said, "for he

will talk. You must keep him as quiet as possible, however."

"Now," said Nick, anxiously, as the physician disappeared, "tell me about it. How does the case stand?"

"Well," began the assistant, "I was standing in the rear of the conservatory when you passed into the death-trap."

"I saw the girl—remarkably handsome girl, too—go away and leave you, and then I saw the door close. I was just making up my mind to get to you in some way, when I heard a faint call."

"Faint," said Nick, "I used all my strength."

"Well, the doors deadened the sound of your voice, then. There was no one in sight, and I bolted through the glass window of the conservatory, opened the door, and dragged you out."

"And had a battle with the inmates of the cottage," added Nick.

"No," was the reply. "No one appeared. The girl and servants must have been in a distant part of the house."

"Probably," suggested Nick. "They may not be used to scenes of murder."

"You lay like a log in my arms, and you aren't a remarkably light man," resumed Chick, "so I laid you down back of the garden fence to rest a bit. While there I saw lights in the conservatory, and heard the girl's voice."

"All she said was that her prisoner had opened the door in some way, and escaped by shattering the conservatory windows."

"To whom was she speaking—the doctor?"

"No, to a giant of a fellow, who seemed to be a servant of some sort. I reckon he is the doctor's assistant."

"They never suspected that I had had help from the outside?"

"No."

"That is excellent. What next?"

"I got you here, called the physician, and went back to the cottage as fast as a good horse could carry me."

"That's right, my boy," said Nick, heartily, "never neglect business. Work comes first, sick people second."

"When I reached the place, I found the girl and the giant trying to repair the damage I had done to the conservatory. I hustled back to a glazier's shop, found the fellow asleep in his place of business, got what I wanted by paying a good price for it, and hastened back to the cottage."

"That's pure luck," said Nick.

"Hardly," replied Chick. "I have been in Maplewood before, and I knew right where to find a glazier asleep, half drunk, in his shop. I occupied that shop one night while working a case, and the glazier was drunk all night. Well, they were still trying to repair the damage I had done when I got back, and I walked right up to them."

"I said it was a wonder they wouldn't give an honest, hard-working man a job fixing the windows, and they looked at me mighty suspiciously, I can tell you."

"They wanted to know who I was and what I was doing there at that time of night, and I said my name was Jones, and that I worked for the glazier of whom I had procured my outfit. Then I added that I had been in the outskirts doing a job, and was just getting home when I heard them rattling the glass in the conservatory."

"You are improving as a good, all-round prevaricator," said Nick.

"I think it must be because of the company I keep," said Chick, with a wink. "Well, after some Jewing, they employed me to do the job."

"I asked them how the glass got broken, and they said a dog jumped through it, which was not very complimentary to me."

"Go on."

"Well, sir," resumed Chick, "do you know that job kept me there most of the night?"

"Until the doctor got home, I suppose," said Nick.

"Exactly. You see, they wanted it done just so, because it was a chilly night, and they were afraid their costly plants would be injured by the frost. I got it most done once, but the doctor was not there yet, so I tumbled through a pane and had to do it all over again."

Nick laughed heartily.

"The giant swore at me, and offered to punch my head on the most liberal terms," continued Chick; "but I kept my temper. At last I got sight of the doctor, and he was a sight."

"In what way?"

"His clothing was torn, and he was mud from one end to the other. And his shoes! You ought to have seen those shoes! They were loaded down with earth—not the kind of earth you see on the surface, but the kind that comes from deep in the ground."

"What do you make of that?" asked Nick, with a slight smile.

"I will answer your question by asking one," replied the assistant. "What did you find in the closets opening from the doctor's private room? Looking through the glass of the conservatory, I saw you examining them"

"Human skeletons," replied Nick, briefly.

"Well," continued Chick, "how does the doctor procure his skeletons? By taking dead men and women from their graves. He must have been at it that night, and so got his clothes in a muss."

"You are undoubtedly right," said Nick. "Besides being a forger and a manipulator of disguises, our student of anatomy is a resurrectionist, a grave robber."

"Yes," said Chick, "and the woman you met at his cottage—the fair young creature

who doubtless led Edward Freeman to his ruin—is a murderess. You are supposed to be dead now."

"They are a bad lot," replied Nick. "Did the doctor bring a body home with him that night?"

"Yes."

Nick started.

"Did you see it?" he asked.

"No."

"Then how do you know he brought one home?"

"I heard him tell the giant to put something into the pickling vat," was the reply. "What do they usually put into the pickling vat?"

"Bodies for dissection, of course."

"Then that settles it," said Chick. "We'll catch the old man at his tricks before we get done with him."

"But all this," said Nick, "does not explain how the doctor got his clothes torn."

"I can't understand that myself," was the reply. "He might have been discovered, and had a fight with the watchman at the cemetery."

"In that case," said Nick, "he would not have got off with the body, and, again, the papers would have been full of the affair. This robbing of graves is something the public will not stand, and the papers always kick up a big row over it."

"Well," said Chick, "we'll have to find out about the clothes when you get out again."

"What has become of the doctor?" asked Nick, after a short silence.

"He's hanging about as if nothing had happened."

"That shows that he was not attacked by watchmen in the cemetery that night," said Nick; "still he must have had a hand-to-hand fight with some one. If he had fought the watchmen, he would be lying low now."

"Judging from his appearance, he fought some one hard."

"There's another thing," continued Nick, "and that is this: Why are the people at the cottage so unconcerned regarding the whereabouts and the probable action of the man they tried to murder there!"

"I have been thinking about that," replied Chick, "and I have made up my mind that they believe you to be dead—that you died from the effects of the poisonous gas after you made your escape."

"That is probably the correct solution of the matter," said Nick. "Besides being a bad lot, they are also a bold lot, and willing to take wide chances."

"I should say so."

"And still," mused the detective, "from their standpoint, they do not appear to be risking much by living in the old place as if nothing had happened."

"How so?"

"First, they believe they succeeded in killing the man who found his way into the house, and talked about the missing check."

"Yes, we will admit that, from their standpoint they have nothing to fear from him."

"Second, the doctor got away with the body without detection, and got it home."

"Probably."

"Well, then, what have they to fear? You must remember that the forgery case has not yet attracted their attention to any alarming extent."

"But there is Jasper Malloy."

"What about him? We must pick him up at once."

"He has disappeared."

"Ah!"

The detective came very near springing from the bed in his momentary excitement.

"Yes," continued Chick, "he has disappeared."

"When and where was he last seen?" asked Nick, lying down again.

"He went out with Harlan the night you were at the cottage."

"Well, did he return with him?"

"No."

"Go on. I see by your face that there is more to tell."

"They left the cottage together," resumed Chick; "but did not stay together long. Jasper was seen at a road house alone in an hour's time."

"At a road house?" asked Nick. "Which way from the city?"

"In the direction of the cemetery."

"Ah!"

"The young man was drinking heavily there, and playing cards, but did not remain very long. From that time to this I have not been able to find hide or hair of the fellow."

Nick spent several moments in a brown study.

"Do you think he has taken alarm and run away?" asked Chick.

"No. Why should he run away? He knows nothing of what has been discovered in the forgery matter. He knows that Freeman is under arrest, and that is about all he does know. He doesn't suspect that we tracked him to Englewood."

"I can't understand it," said Chick.

"The job was put up to stick Freeman," said Nick, "and so the other conspirators are not alarmed at his arrest. They mean, for some reason, to have him convicted."

"Freeman might peach."

"They think to outswear him, if he does. No, there is no reason why Jasper Malloy should run away."

"He may have met with foul play," suggested Chick.

Nick smiled, but said nothing.

"Speaking of Freeman," said Chick, after

a pause, "brings us back to first principles. The young man still declares his innocence."

"Have you seen his mother?"

"No."

"She may be able to give us some points."

"Especially regarding the Harlans," added Chick.

"You had better go there at once," said Nick.

"It is late, and she may not receive me," said the assistant, looking at his watch.

"Yes, she will," replied Nick. "She will talk with any one who has a hand in the case against her son."

"Then I had better go at once."

"Yes, and find out if Mrs. Freeman has been to the Harlan cottage, and, if so, what she saw and heard there."

Chick hastened away, and was gone a long time.

When he returned, he evinced considerable excitement.

"What is it?" asked Nick, regarding the flushed face of his usually calm assistant with a smile.

"Mrs. Freeman followed us to the Harlan cottage on the night you got trapped."

"Followed us?"

"I don't mean that she shadowed us," explained Chick. "I mean that she got there about as soon as we did."

"She was met at the door by the girl, who provided you with such snug quarters."

"You mean Edith Harlan."

Again the face of the assistant flushed with excitement.

"The girl you saw," he said, "is not the Edith Harlan we have imagined her to be."

"Who is she?" demanded Nick.

"She announced herself to Mrs. Freeman as Edith Harlan, not the adopted daughter, but the wife of the doctor."

"His wife? How long has she been in the house?"

"Only a few days."

"Well, if the woman I saw is the wife, where is the daughter?"

"She has left the cottage."

"What do they say about her?"

"The woman refused to account for her absence."

"That is very strange."

"It may be," suggested Chick, "that she has eloped with Jasper Malloy."

"Pshaw! Jasper is the doctor's favorite. If she has gone away on his account it was to get rid of him. This opens up a new phase of the case."

"You think the girl favors Freeman in this case."

"She probably does. At any rate, she seems to know too much to suit the villainous doctor and the woman who calls herself his wife."

"Then she may have been murdered by the conspirators," said Chick, with a shudder.

"No," replied Nick, "Jasper wants to make her his wife. He would not consent to such a thing. I believe he is helping to get Freeman out of the way, because the girl loves him."

"But Jasper has also disappeared."

"Well, they may both have been murdered," said Nick, "although I can't understand why the doctor should want him out of the way."

CHAPTER V.

THE MAN IN THE CARRIAGE.

The next morning the detective was able to resume work on the case, although he still felt the effects of his experience in the doctor's death-trap.

He first paid a visit to Edward Freeman, whom he found looking pale and disheartened.

He had already been informed by his

mother of the disappearance of Edith Harlan.

"Now," said Nick, "perhaps you will tell me what you should have told me at the trust company's office last Monday."

"I have nothing to tell," was the dejected reply.

"Not even the name of the person to whom you exhibited the check?"

Freeman shook his head.

"Well," said the detective, "I have fortunately been able to discover that much. You showed the check to Miss Edith Harlan, at her adopted father's cottage, in Maplewood."

"I don't understand how you learned that," said Freeman.

"Did she return the check?"

"I think she did."

"Then how comes it that you did not have it in your possession on Monday?"

"I don't know."

"Did she take the check into her hand?"

"Certainly. She retained possession of it for some moments."

"Where were you at the time?"

"In the parlor."

"Were you near the writing-desk at the time?"

The young man seemed surprised at the detective's evident knowledge of the parlor and its furniture.

"Yes," he answered, "we were near the writing-desk at the time."

"Who else was present?"

"No one."

"Who was in the house?"

"No one save the doctor and the servants."

"Did you remain in that one room all the time you were in the house that night?"

"No; we went to the conservatory."

"Before or after you exhibited the check?"

"After. I do not remember of seeing the check after we returned to the parlor."

Nick drew from his pocket one of the sheets of paper taken from the writing-desk.

Freeman turned pale when he saw what the sheet contained.

"Whose writing is that?" asked Nick.

"It seems to be that of Doctor Harlan."

"It is not your own?"

"No; it is not mine."

It certainly did not resemble the handwriting of the assistant book-keeper.

"Then," said Nick, "the forgery must have been committed by Doctor Harlan."

"It does not seem possible."

"Are you certain," asked Nick, "that, when you went into the conservatory, you did not leave the check on the writing-desk?"

"I do not think I did."

"Yet the doctor secured possession of it, removed the blank, and copied the signatures."

"There must be some mistake about it. I do not believe he would do such a thing. Why, it would be sure to get me into trouble."

"Granted, but then the doctor is not inclined to favor your suit, as I understand it."

"No, he does not. He wants Edith to marry Malloy, for financial reasons."

"Now," said the detective, putting the paper back into his pocket, "where were you last Sunday night?"

"I decline to state."

"You are not helping your case by the course you are pursuing," said Nick, "for I know where you went that night."

Freeman turned paler than ever, but remained silent.

"You were," continued Nick, "at a hotel in Englewood, in company with Jasper Malloy. Is that true?"

"Yes."

"What were you doing there?"

Freeman shook his head.

"I can't tell you," he said.

"Do you know what sort of a man Doctor Harlan is?" asked Nick.

"I am afraid he is a crank on the subject of anatomy."

"He is all of that, and more, too," said Nick, with a smile. "Do you know that he was at the Englewood Hotel on Monday morning?"

"No; what was he there for?"

"He went there to hold the room while Malloy presented the check at the bank for payment."

"This is all news to me."

"Tell me why you went to the hotel that night?"

"I cannot do it."

"See where your refusal leaves you," urged the detective. "The blank check is traced to you. Traces of the actual forgery are discovered in the house where you admit having the check. The next night you are seen in an unusual place with the man who presented the check for payment. The check from which the false paper was copied, which ought to be in your possession, cannot be found. Oh, we have a clear case against you!"

"And yet I am innocent. If you are sure that Jasper Malloy presented the forged paper for payment, why don't you arrest him?"

"All in good time," said Nick. "I never close in until the game is fairly trapped."

"And yet you arrested me."

"That was a matter of necessity. No other course would have satisfied the trust company and the bank."

"Well, you ought to arrest Malloy and Doctor Harlan without delay. They are liable to disappear at any moment."

"Are you aware," asked the detective, "that Doctor Harlan is a grave robber?"

"I have suspected it."

"Does Edith know?"

"She never mentioned the matter to me, but I think she does."

"Is that why she went away?"

"She has not gone away," said the prisoner. "Something dreadful has happened to her."

The young man sprang to his feet as he spoke.

"If I had my freedom," he said, "I'd choke the truth out of that devil of a doctor."

"Who is the new Edith Harlan?" asked Nick.

"I don't know. I never even heard of her until my mother came here the other day. I think, however, that she is the daughter of the doctor's helper."

Satisfied that he could learn nothing from Freeman, Nick left him and joined his assistant.

"The young man may be the victim of a conspiracy," he said to Chick; "but he acts strangely. I should be inclined to favor him, if he would tell me the truth about that meeting at the Englewood Hotel."

"He is either guilty," replied Chick, "or he is still trying to protect the girl in some way. Where next?"

"To the road house on the way to the cemetery."

"To trace Malloy? And to arrest him at once?"

"Certainly. Who saw him there?"

"A young man who lives near the Malloy residence on Dayton street."

"Have you looked up the Malloy family?"

"Yes: there are only two members of it—Jasper and his old father. The old gentleman, who was quite wealthy, is said to believe in Jasper. In fact, he has already deeded him most of his property."

"And Jasper has probably squandered it—gambled it away."

The detectives were soon at the road

house, a dilapidated structure with a shady reputation.

The bartender remembered seeing Jasper there, although he did not know him by name.

"Was he alone?" asked Nick.

"Yes."

"Did he call for a room?"

"I don't know. You'll have to ask the clerk about that."

The clerk was soon found.

"Yes," he said, "the fellow had a room here, and a nice mess he made of it."

"May we see the room?" asked Nick.

The clerk replied in the affirmative, and summoned a muscular woman who acted as chambermaid.

After ascending a flight of stairs, the detectives were shown into a small room opening toward the rear of the house.

"He must have had the jim-jams," said the woman, "for he broke the furniture and tore around like a madman."

At that moment another woman, passing through the hall, paused in front of the open door of the room and looked in.

"They had a scrap in there," she said, with a wink and a curl of her coarse lips.

"They?" repeated the chambermaid. "What do you mean by saying they? There was only one man in the room."

"Oh, yes, there was!" replied the other, advancing into the room. "A dark-looking fellow, with gray hair, followed the young man into the room, and they had a scrap here, just as I told you."

"This is becoming interesting," thought Nick.

For the second time in the history of the case the two conspirators had been traced to a room which only one of them was supposed to occupy.

"What did you find in the room after they

went out?" asked the detective, turning to the chambermaid.

"Oh, just a lot of torn papers," was the reply.

"What did you do with them?"

The woman pointed to a waste-paper basket, and went on with her work.

Nick closed the door of the room, and dumped the contents of the basket on the table.

Then both detectives set to work with a will.

Soon the scraps of paper lay in a little heap on one corner of the table.

There were not very many of them. The whole pile was not enough to constitute one-half of a legal blank, which the printed form seemed to represent.

Nick worked cautiously over the papers for a long time, then placed them in his pocket-book.

"Well?" said Chick, who had made nothing whatever of the mess of ragged-edged scraps.

"It is plain," began Nick, "that the doctor came out here for some purpose of his own, probably on his way to the cemetery, and found the young man here."

"Jasper got full enough to go to bed, and came to this room. Harlan followed him, and began urging him to complete some sort of business they had between them."

"That business involved the transfer of deeds. These scraps represent title deeds, running to some unknown party, and signed by Jasper Malloy."

"Ah! I begin to understand now how the doctor got his clothes torn that night," said Chick.

"Don't be in a hurry," said Nick, with a most exasperating smile. "The damage to the doctor's garments was not all done here."

"Go on," said Chick, impatiently.

"The two men talked themselves into a

rage," resumed Nick, "and Jasper tore his name from the deeds, which were probably drawn in favor of Doctor Harlan."

"So that is what they fought about? Well, when rogues fall out, honest men may come by their own."

"I can't understand why Jasper should be giving Harlan deeds to real estate," continued Nick; "but it was probably on account of the daughter. At any rate, they fought, and that is all we know about it at present."

"Harlan may have some hold on Jasper," suggested Chick.

"In that case," replied Nick, "the deeds would not have been destroyed before the doctor's eyes. No, there was a sudden quarrel about something—perhaps about the forged check."

"Jasper changed his mind about staying here all night," said the assistant, "and he might have gone away with Harlan. The point is well worth looking up, it seems to me."

"Right you are," said Nick. "We will look it up at once, for what we desire to know just now is, what has become of Jasper Malloy?"

The detectives went at once to the barn, where they interviewed the stable-boy.

He knew Jasper by sight, for he had been there before, but he did not know his name.

"Yes," he said, in answer to a question, "the man you describe came here alone and went away alone."

"Which way did he go?" asked Nick.

The stable-boy did not remember.

"Hold on," said a helper, stepping up, "I saw the man you speak of when he went away. He drove out to the gate, turned his team over to a fellow who had been trying to get him to go home, and walked off toward the cemetery."

Nick clutched his assistant by the arm.

"I thought so," Chick heard him mutter.

"Did you see him when he came back?" asked Nick.

"Yes."

"Was he walking?"

"No, sir; he was riding in a carriage with another man."

"Did they stop here?"

"No; it was late at night, and I was out in the road with a lantern helping a drunken woman into a hack and they came driving along. That is how I came to see them."

"Do you know the man he was with?"

"He was all muffled up."

"Did either of the men speak to you?"

"No; the young man was stiff drunk. He just sat back in the corner of the carriage and slept."

"Might it not have been some other man you saw in the carriage?"

"If it was some other man, he had on the young fellow's coat and hat, and the stable-boy, who was looking in at the back window of the carriage, thought he recognized his evil face."

"They were driving toward the city?"

"Yes, sir."

The detectives turned away without another word.

"You remember what Harlan took home that night?" asked Nick, as they drove back.

"Yes; he took home a human body—just from the grave. How, then, could Jasper Malloy occupy a seat in his carriage?"

"It strikes me," said Nick, "that the wisest thing for us to do is to get a look at the body in the pickling vat at the Harlan cottage."

CHAPTER VI.

THE BODY IN THE VAT.

Chick gazed at his chief with a sudden horror in his eyes.

"Do you think," he asked, "that the body

placed in the vat that night was the body of Jasper Malloy?"

Nick smiled.

"I don't think anything about it," he said.

"It remains for us to ascertain the fact."

"Why should Harlan murder Malloy?"

"He may have threatened the doctor with exposure. I imagine that Doctor Harlan has led a very bad life."

"But Malloy was equally guilty, so far as the forgery case is concerned."

"Yes," replied Nick; "but suppose the doctor to have been guilty of murder. The forgery case might send Malloy over the road for a few years. A revealed murder would send the doctor to the gallows."

"Well," said Chick, drawing a long breath, "our little forgery case is developing in great shape."

"It seems so, and the check we started out to find is still missing."

"It may have been destroyed."

"Hardly. The fight at the road house may have been for the possession of that very bit of paper, the deeds being brought in later, after the quarrel was well under way. I wonder who has it now?"

"Then you think we shall find the check?"

"I have not the least doubt of it."

It was afternoon when the detectives reached the Harlan cottage.

The woman who had announced herself as the doctor's wife was just driving away.

She glanced carelessly at the two rough-looking men, as they turned in at the gate and motioned to the driver of the carriage to hasten away.

The two detectives walked up to the door and rang the bell.

In a moment the muscular helper stood before them with a sneer on his evil face.

"What do you want?" he demanded. "Why didn't you go to the rear entrance?"

"We've got somethin' to sell," said Nick, with a wink.

"Then," said the giant, the sneer changing to a scowl, "you'd better go to some one what wants to buy."

He attempted to close the door as he spoke, but Chick threw his shoulder against it and prevented his doing so.

"You wasn't behind the door when they gave out gall," said the giant. "Get away from here, or it will be the worse for you."

"Look here," said Nick, "we done business wid de doctor w'en de people around here wasn't so mighty fresh. You send for de doctor, dat's wot you do."

The giant hesitated.

He knew that his master occasionally bought bodies of just such men as the detectives appeared to be, and he did not dare send them away without knowing more about their business.

He stepped away from the door, and allowed the detectives to enter the little hallway.

"You wait here," he said, "an' I'll go and call the doctor—that is, if he is at home."

As the fellow disappeared, the door through which he passed closed with a sharp click.

Nick cautiously turned the handle, and found it locked.

"They don't take chances here," he said, with a smile.

In a moment, however, the door opened again, and Doctor Harlan stood looking out at them.

"Well," he said, with a smile, "what do you want?"

"We want," said Nick, "to see you on de same old business."

"What business?"

Nick glanced around with seeming suspicion.

"I don't know nothin' about talkin' busi-

ness in a place like dis," he said. "You take us down where de bones is, an' we'll open up."

The doctor hesitated.

"I don't remember you," he said.

Nick started away, in seeming anger.

"You're too gay," he said. "We done some diggin' on our own hook las' night an' thought you might want w'at we found, but, if you don't, it's all right."

"Hold on," said the doctor. "If you have a specimen, I shall be glad to talk with you. Step inside, please."

Before the detectives could accept the invitation, however, the helper drew his master aside and whispered something to him.

Harlan nodded, and turned back to the detectives.

"As you know," he said, "my study is small, so only one can come at a time. The other may remain here with Ira."

"All right," said Nick. "I'll leave me chum here. If dere's any monkey work, it won't go good. See?"

The doctor stepped away, closely followed by the detective, and Chick was shown into a small reception-room.

The helper seated himself in the same apartment, and the two men sat facing each other for some moments, each seemingly oblivious of the presence of the other.

Presently there came from the direction of the rear of the cottage the sound of hurrying footsteps.

Ira sprang to his feet, and moved toward the door.

Then he paused a moment, and looked irresolutely at the detective.

He was not quite willing to leave him there alone.

The next instant a scuffle was heard.

Then came a scream and a fall.

Chick arose, and advanced toward the door.

The giant motioned him back.

"The doctor has an insane woman in charge," he said, "an' I suppose she's raisin' the devil ag'in."

He opened the door a little wider as he spoke, being careful to stand so that his massive body obstructed the view of the detective.

Just then the clear, sharp tones of a woman's angry voice reached Chick's ears.

"I'll have you chained and whipped, if you don't behave yourself," the voice said.

Ira opened the door and darted through, closing it after him.

In a moment Chick stood with his hand on the knob.

The door was locked, but that delayed him only an instant.

Inserting his pick-lock, he soon heard the bolt shoot back, and then the door opened.

Chick found himself in the sitting-room of the cottage.

From the back of the house came the sound of sobbing, and he hastened in that direction.

"Get the whip! She always cuts up when people are here. Get the whip, I say!"

The voice was that of the giant helper.

Chick opened the door at the rear of the sitting-room, and found himself looking down a narrow passage leading to the conservatory, which he had such good reason to remember.

"Let me alone," said another voice—a singularly sweet voice, the detective thought—"or I will call the police."

"Go back to your room, then, and keep still."

Again Ira was the speaker.

"Why am I kept in my room?" asked the voice, which had made such an impression on the detective. "I have some rights in this house. Why is that women here? Send her away."

Chick heard the sound of a blow, and then all was quiet.

He crept along the passage, and stood at the entrance to the conservatory.

There was no one in sight.

The conservatory was empty, so far as human life was concerned.

Then Chick heard a noise like the slamming of a trap-door.

In a moment the heavy steps of the giant were heard approaching the place where the detective stood.

Chick cautiously retraced his steps, and when Ira entered the reception-room he found the detective just where he had left him.

"What did you go out there for?" demanded the giant.

"Out where?"

"Out there in the conservatory. Oh, you needn't say you didn't, for I heard your footsteps on the floor, over my head."

So the cries had come from the basement.

That was just what Chick wanted to know.

"I thought I might be of some use," he said. "It ain't a good job to handle mad women alone."

The giant glanced at Chick suspiciously.

"You'd better look out where you go and what you do in this house," he said. "We don't stand no foolishness here."

"Oh, come off," said Chick. "You ain't half so tough as you look. I ain't afraid of you. I could sell you all over de road."

The giant sprang forward with an oath.

It was evident that he intended to punish the seeming tough there and then.

Chick threw himself into position, but at that instant the voice of the doctor was heard in the adjoining room.

"Ira!"

The tone was loud and imperative, and

the giant dropped his huge fists to his side, and hastened to the door.

"I'll attend to you directly," he said, looking back with a fierce scowl on his face.

He closed the door behind him, and the detective again heard the sharp clink of the lock.

The doctor evidently was much excited, for his voice rang out so that the listening detective had no difficulty in hearing what was being said.

"Where's that other tough?" he demanded.

"Where you left him," was the sullen reply.

"Well," said the doctor, "the one who went to the surgery with me has given me the slip."

The giant's reply was an oath.

"When we got to the operating room," continued the doctor, "I left him standing there for a moment while I went into the conservatory, and when I returned he was not there."

"Where did he go, then?" demanded the giant. "He didn't pass out by the front door."

"He must have gone into the vat room in the basement," replied the doctor, "for I went there at once, and found that the cover of the vat had been removed."

Chick heard the giant laughing grimly.

"He didn't take the body away, did he?" the giant said, in a moment. "It was a piece of carelessness to let him get there."

"No, the body is all right," was the reply. "You had better send the other fellow away, and come down and help look him up."

Chick started for the front entrance.

"Nick has secured the information he wanted," he thought; "but I don't understand why he left the place so suddenly."

With his hand on the knob of the door,

Chick paused again, attracted by the doctor's voice.

"I believe," that worthy was saying, "that the fellow came here to try and identify the body in the vat. We must not allow him to leave the house."

"He's probably out before this time," said the giant.

"Now," thought Chick, softly opening the door and stepping out on the porch, "I wonder if the racket with the girl had anything to do with Nick's sudden departure?"

The detective was hardly off the porch, when the street door opened and the giant and the doctor appeared in view.

"Come back here," said the latter. "Your chum wants you to help him."

"I don't wait no longer in that place," said Chick. "Dat bully of yours tried to put a head on me just now."

The giant started down the walk on a run, but Chick was too swift for him.

When the fellow reached the street, Chick was some distance away, walking leisurely along just behind a patrolman in uniform.

The giant turned back, and entered the house.

Chick met his chief half a block down the street.

"Haven't you alarmed the fellows by making such a quick sneak?" asked the assistant.

"I am afraid so," was the reply; "but it could not be helped. The result is that we've got to work fast for a little while."

"What did you see down there?"

"I saw the real Edith Harlan, bound and gagged, and lying faint and suffering on the floor of a foul basement."

CHAPTER VII.

THE CHECK IN THE GRAVE.

"My God!" exclaimed Chick, "what can be the meaning of that?"

"We haven't time to find out at present,"

replied Nick. "We must get out to the cemetery as soon as possible."

"Where did you leave the girl?"

Nick laughed and walked on for a moment without speaking.

"Where do you think I left her?" he then asked.

"I have no idea."

"Well, I left her in one of the closets where the doctor keeps his skeletons."

"Rather close quarters, I should say."

"No, there is plenty of room, and I threw in a lot of rugs and blankets for her to recline on. She will do very well there until we get back."

"Then you got out without looking at the body in the vat?"

"By no means. The body in the vat is not the body of Jasper Malloy."

"Are you sure? You know the pickle changes countenances wonderfully, and this body must have been in the brine for three days."

"Yes; I didn't have much time in there, but I am sure. You see, after I got the girl out I had to make a quick skip or have a battle with the doctor and his giant. We could have defeated them, but I am tired of this knock-out business. Besides, when I arrest the doctor, I want to have the case close right there."

"Yes," said Chick, thoughtfully; "I suppose they would have jumped on to you about the disappearance of the girl. The giant suspected me of taking too much interest in the affairs of the house."

"They certainly would have done so," said Nick, "and such an affray would have been premature. Remember, we haven't found our check yet."

"But won't they look in the closet for the girl? I know from what I heard that they intend searching the house for you."

"I think not. I got away so neatly

through a rear window that they will think I took her with me."

"Well, 'now, what about the cemetery?" asked Chick.

"Can't you imagine?"

"I have an idea."

"Well, the doctor brought a body home with him that night, didn't he?"

"Certainly."

"And brought it home in a carriage?"

"Undoubtedly."

"And the body was what the stableman saw at the road-house?"

"I don't know about that. You must recollect that the person with the doctor wore Jasper Malloy's hat and coat. The doctor may have had the body later on."

"Hardly. Well, if I am right, this shows that the doctor had his hands on the young man after they had the fight at the road-house. If it does not, I have additional proof of the fact."

"Well?"

Nick took a narrow piece of leather from his pocket.

"Do you know what this is?" he asked.

"Certainly. It is part of the sweat-band of a hat."

"Do you see that name?" asked Nick, turning the bit of leather over in his hand.

Chick started back with an exclamation of surprise.

The name on the sweat-band was that of Jasper Malloy.

"Where did you find it?" Chick asked, in a moment.

"On the floor, by the pickling vat. The doctor must be an economical fellow. He cut this out in order to save the hat."

"I begin to see what you are driving at," said Chick. "It is all very horrible."

"Yes," said Nick, "Malloy probably met his fate when he went out to the cemetery that night."

"But the hat was there at the house," said Chick, "and the body in the carriage wore Malloy's things. Are you dead sure the body in the vat is not the body of Jasper Malloy?"

"Dead sure," replied Nick.

"Then," said Chick, "we know where to look for the body of Jasper Malloy?"

"Yes."

"Because the fight must have taken place in the cemetery, or the dead body would not have been covered with Malloy's coat and hat."

"Exactly."

"And when the deadly blow was struck, there was an open grave right there. It is horrible."

"Yes," said the detective. "Harlan, if he did murder Malloy, probably disposed of the body in the easiest way."

"Most undoubtedly."

There was no need to continue the conversation.

The detectives understood each other thoroughly; so words were useless.

The rig they had used on the trip to the road-house stood at a barn not far away, and the detectives lost no time in getting to it.

In five minutes they were driving swiftly toward the cemetery.

They reached the place about four o'clock in the afternoon, and at once went to the office of the superintendent.

"First," said Nick, "we must find out who was buried here on Monday. It is the newly-made graves we want to investigate. The doctor would not be likely to resurrect a body that had been in the ground long."

The list was soon in the possession of the detectives.

It was a very short one, for there are usually few burials on Monday.

Only a few men had been buried there on that day.

The man in charge of the grounds looked suspiciously at the two detectives as they moved about, but said nothing.

He, however, sent a man to watch them.

The third grave they located showed evidences of having been disturbed.

Nick called the watchman to his side.

"Were you here on Monday night?" he asked.

The watchman nodded.

"Did you hear any unusual noise in this part of the cemetery?"

"Yes; there was a great racket here about midnight, or shortly after, but we could discover nothing."

"Did you come to this spot?"

"No."

"Well, a body was taken from this cemetery Monday night, and it is probable that it was taken from this grave. Call your men, and tell them to open it."

"That's all very well," replied the fellow; "but I want to see your authority first."

Nick showed his badge, and also exhibited a paper, disclosing his name.

"That is satisfactory to me," said the watchman; "but I shall be obliged to consult with the superintendent."

"Make haste, then," said Nick, "for it will soon be dark."

The superintendent was soon on the spot, and then work was commenced.

"See," said Nick, pointing to the soft earth being turned out by the spades of the laborers, "the grave has been tampered with. We are on the right track at last."

"You expect to find it empty?" asked the superintendent.

"Wait until they get to the bottom," was the reply.

At last the implements of the diggers sounded on the top of the rough box inclosing the coffin.

"The cover has been moved," shouted one of the men.

"Now," said Nick, turning to the superintendent, "I want to open the box myself. Please tell your men to come up."

The superintendent did as requested.

Nick sprang into the open grave, and carefully brushed away the remaining earth.

The superintendent bent over as Nick raised the box cover.

"The coffin is open," he shouted. "The grave has been robbed."

The next instant a cry of terror sprang from the lips of the grave-diggers.

"No," they said, "the body is there, but it is covered with blood. The man must have been buried alive."

Chick was not slow in springing into the grave.

The face in the coffin was the face of Jasper Malloy.

He had been struck on the head with some blunt instrument, and cast into the coffin while still bleeding—possibly while still alive.

Nick carefully unbuttoned the coat and vest of the murdered man and reached his hand into an inner pocket.

When he removed it, he held a thin piece of paper.

The paper was covered with blood, but it was easily identified.

It was the forged check for eighty thousand dollars.

The doctor had buried it in the grave with his victim.

There must have been a sharp struggle, for the dead man's clothes were badly torn.

CHAPTER VIII.

IN THE DISSECTING-ROOM.

It was nearly dark when the detectives left the cemetery.

Before taking their departure, they caused the coroner to be notified, and made other arrangements for the removal of the body.

"Now," said Nick, as they drove away, "we can close the case before we sleep, and we shall soon know something about Freeman's connection with the forgery."

"The more I think of it," said Chick, "the more I am inclined to the belief that the young man is innocent."

"Why do you think that?" asked Nick.

"Because the young fellow has an excellent reputation everywhere, and because the other parties are decidedly tough."

"I have better reasons than that for believing him to be innocent," said Nick.

"What are they?"

"In the first place," replied Nick, "Freeman would not have lost his check if he had been in the conspiracy. If he had known of the making of the fraudulent paper, he would have been careful to have his own check where he could place his hands on it."

"It seems so."

"This would have relieved him of the suspicion of having allowed the good check to be used as a copy in making the bad one."

"I see."

"And then, he would never have mentioned showing the salary check to any one. If guilty, he would have been on his guard, and would have had a plausible story to tell about how the blank check might have become detached from the salary check."

"And yet, with all these things in his favor, you have kept him in prison."

"Yes," replied Nick, "but you must remember the part he played at the hotel. He persistently refuses to explain why he met Jasper Malloy there that night."

"That looks black for him."

"Decidedly so."

It was dark when they reached the Harlan cottage.

A dim light was burning in the sitting-room, and a reflection on the conservatory windows showed that some one was occupying the dissecting-room.

"There are two desperate men in there," said Nick, "and we must capture them both. We may have a fight for it, but I think we shall win. We have not time to send word to Patsy, or any of the others."

"You forget the woman," said Chick. "She may be a harder case than either of the men."

"That is true," was the reply, "but the doctor is the one we want the most of all, so I will pay my attentions to him."

"How are you going to get into the house?"

"The same way I got out this afternoon," was the reply. "You must make a change of some kind and get into the front room. Perhaps you can keep your eye on the giant and the woman while I capture the doctor."

"I can try," replied Chick.

"They are both dangerous," said Nick, "so be careful."

Nick hastened toward the rear of the cottage, and Chick, who had assumed the dress of a prosperous physician in a convenient place on the way down, walked up to the door and rang the bell.

The giant answered the summons, standing with his bulky person in the little opening.

"I want to see Dr. Harlan," said the detective.

The giant was evidently suspicious.

"What do you want of the doctor?" he demanded. "He is tired out, and does not care to meet patients to-night."

"I am a physician," was the reply, "and wish to consult with him in regard to a case of surgery."

The giant grudgingly opened the door, and admitted the seeming doctor to the reception-room.

There he glanced at every detail of the detective's dress, but failed to recognize him as the young man he had chased into the street a few hours before.

His scrutiny over, the giant stepped to the door of the sitting-room and called out to some one there.

The next moment the beautiful woman who had announced herself as Mrs. Harlan made her appearance.

"I am afraid you cannot see the doctor to-night," she said, with a smile. "He is tired, and very busy."

Chick explained the supposed object of his visit, and the woman hesitated.

Doctors like to be consulted on the subject of their hobby, and surgery was Harlan's hobby. She did not dare send the man away without consulting her husband.

"Well," she said, in a moment, "you may wait here until I see my husband. He may be induced to meet you."

The woman left the room, leaving the giant in charge of the unwelcome visitor.

In a moment Chick heard a commotion in the direction of the dissecting-room.

"Nick is there," he thought. "Now, how am I to handle this big fellow?"

Just then a scream of fright came from the rear of the cottage.

"The devil is in this place to-day," muttered the giant, making for the door.

Chick saw his opportunity, and took advantage of it.

One quick spring, and he had the burly fellow by the throat.

One dexterous movement of his body, and Ira lay upon the floor, half-strangled and foaming with rage.

The giant was the stronger man of the two, but he was taken entirely by surprise, and he found it impossible to break the hold of the detective.

In a moment he was handcuffed, Chick taking good care to put a strong pair of irons on the fellow, and also to bind his feet.

"Now, my fine fellow," he said, "we shall soon know what sort of a den you keep here."

The giant was incapable of replying.

Chick turned toward the door, and then walked back to his prisoner.

"I don't think I can trust you," he said. "Take a little of this to quiet your nerves."

As he spoke, Chick took a bottle of chloroform from his pocket, saturated a handkerchief with it, and held it to the nostrils of the struggling giant.

Before long he quieted down, lying on the carpeted floor like a dead man. The chloroform had done its work rapidly and well.

Chick had hardly completed this task when a struggle was heard in the dissecting-room, and the woman called out:

"Father! Come here, quick."

"I think Nick must be getting in his work," thought the detective, hastening in the direction of the sound.

When he reached the door of the dissecting-room, Nick was nowhere to be seen.

The doctor was there, fighting like mad with the girl Nick had concealed in the skeleton closet.

In attempting to escape, a moment after the detectives had entered the house, the girl had been discovered by the doctor, and was now fighting hard for her liberty.

"Here comes father," said the voice of the doctor's wife, as the footsteps of the de-

detective sounded on the floor outside. "We shall soon see who is master here."

In the confusion of the struggle in the dissecting-room, no one had noticed the noise of the scuffle in the sitting-room.

As Chick stepped into the room, the woman looked up and saw who it was that had entered.

"How dare you come here uninvited?" she demanded, springing toward him with the look of a devil on her handsome face.

Just then the door leading to the conservatory opened, and Nick Carter stepped into the room.

He was dressed just as he had been dressed on the night of his incarceration in the poisoned room.

The doctor's wife sprang away with a cry of fright.

The girl lay upon the floor, where the doctor had thrown her, and Nick at once advanced to her side.

"Come, doctor," he said, "I have a little business to settle with you. Keep your hands off that girl."

Before the doctor could do a thing to protect himself, he was handcuffed and placed in a chair.

His wife still stood looking at Nick with staring eyes.

Chick had no difficulty in placing the irons on her shapely wrists.

"It is a disagreeable duty to perform," he said, "but there is no help for it."

For a moment the doctor and his wife sat looking at each other in silence, then the woman burst forth:

"I know you now," she shouted, shaking her manacled hands at Nick. "You are the man who came here that night and broke the conservatory window. If I had only succeeded in killing you then!"

The doctor remained silent, but his eyes looked like those of a madman.

Nick stepped to the place where the girl lay, in a half faint, and tenderly assisted her to arise.

"That's right," shrieked the woman. "Care for her gently. She will soon be beyond your reach. She is a forger. Take her with the rest."

"For what am I arrested?" asked the doctor, finding his voice.

Nick took the blood-stained check from his pocket.

"For forgery," he said, "and for murder. I found this in Jasper Malloy's grave. Was he dead when you put him there?"

The doctor groaned, and his face became deathly pale.

"It's all up with me," he said.

"Keep your mouth shut," said the woman.

"Yes," said Harlan, "he was dead when I threw him into the coffin. He attacked me in the cemetery, and I killed him in self defense."

"If I only had my hands on your cowardly throat," hissed the doctor's wife.

"It is no use to struggle," said the doctor. "These men have us in a corner."

"About the check," said Nick, "how did you come to leave it in his pocket?"

"The fight was partly over the check," was the reply. "He wouldn't let me have it. I meant to take it from his dead body, but I had no time. I heard some one approaching and made haste to throw the body into the coffin."

"Murderers always make some mistake," said Nick.

"I made a mistake in trusting the matter to Jasper at all," was the reply. "If he had been square, anything but a fool and a gambler, everything would have gone as contemplated. I did not know as the check could be used, after his foolishness at the hotel, but I did not want to leave it in his hands."

Nick turned to the girl.

"Who wrote the forged check?" he asked.

"The woman who calls herself Dr. Harlan's wife."

"It's a lie!"

"Yes, you did," continued the girl. "You stole Mr. Freeman's check from the desk while we were in the conservatory, and found the blank one attached to it. I heard it all talked over."

"She is lying to save herself," said the woman, desperately.

"I heard them planning the murder of Malloy, too," continued the girl, "and they

caught me listening. That is one reason they wanted to kill me."

"But why should they want to kill their partner in crime?" asked the detective.

"Because he was acting ugly about the property he was to give the doctor when I became his wife, and because he was not willing to surrender the check. Then, he had acted so foolishly, they said, that they had no further use for him."

"That clears up everything but one point," said Nick. "Can you tell me why Edward Freeman went to the Englewood hotel last Sunday night—why he was there in company with Jasper Malloy?"

"Yes," replied the girl, blushing deeply. "He went there because Jasper Malloy asked him to. Jasper was to convince him that night that I was unfit to become the wife of any one but himself."

"Ah," said Nick, "that accounts for Freeman's silence on that point. He did not care to bring your name into the case at all, least of all, in such a way."

"They got him there that night," continued the girl, "to connect him with the hotel from which the false check was to be cashed. If you had not in some way discovered that he had been there, the officers would have been told to ask him why he was there that night in the room of the man who afterward presented the check for payment."

"You suspected something was going on, and listened?"

"Yes; and it nearly cost me my life. Only for your coming here to-day, I should have died in the vat vault."

"So you released her, did you?" foamed the doctor's wife.

"I always try to aid ladies in distress," said Nick, with a bow.

"Wait until my father comes down," said the woman, "and you'll see. He is more than a match for you both."

"Your father, if you refer to the giant," said Chick, "has an engagement with the law about this time. He will not come down."

"Have you captured him?"

"Certainly."

"You must be a devil!"

"No," said Nick, "I am only a detective."

"Don't let that woman get away," said Edith. "She is the worst one of the lot. The plot at first was to make me marry Jasper Malloy, and get his property in that way. Then he was blamed for the check not being cashed, and he became angry and refused to deliver the deeds, which had already been drawn, or to give up the check. Then, when I knew what was going on, and it was proposed to murder me, Jasper objected, and that was another reason for putting him out of the way."

The detectives had heard enough.

The prisoners were removed to the police station, and Nick and his assistant hastened to the place where Freeman was confined.

The young man was released at once, and lost no time in reaching home, Edith having already gone to Mrs. Freeman's, there to remain until her marriage with Edward.

Nick and Chick were paid a very large

a sum for their services in the case, and Freeman was advanced by the trust company to a position much better than he had ever expected to occupy.

Dr. Harlan was hanged for the murder of Malloy, and his wife and her father each received twenty years for their part in the affair.

Jasper Malloy's father died of grief, and died a poor man, his son having gambled away nearly all the estate.

Dr. Harlan had also robbed Jasper of a good deal of property.

One of the curiosities now to be seen in Nick Carter's private room is a blood-stained check for eighty thousand dollars.

THE END.

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